

THE CHILDREN'S STORY OF THE WAR



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THE CHILDREN'S STORY OF THE WAR.

By SIR EDWARD PARROTT, M.A., LL.D.

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LIST OF VOLUMES.

- I.—From the Beginning to the Dispatch of the British Army overseas.
- II.—From the Battle of Mons to the Fall of Antwerp.
- III.—From the First Battle of Ypres to the End of the Year 1914
- IV.—The Year 1915.
- V.—The First Six Months of 1916.

In the course of a long review, the *Times Educational Supplement* speaks of the "high level of this admirable work," and describes it as planned "on a scale quite different from anything yet attempted. It is not only a fully-detailed, continuous story, but it aims at providing the reader with the information requisite for a proper understanding of the causes and significance of the war. . . . The story is clearly and vividly given, without being in the least melodramatic. . . . It would be hard to take exception to the temper in which the story is written. . . . It is a sensible plan to put into separate chapters the 'soldiers' stories which illustrate it.'" The work is already recognized as the children's classic of the war, and large numbers of teachers and others have testified to the interest it awakens, and to the enlightenment which it affords. Stirring pictures and illuminative maps and diagrams abound. Readers and friends of weekly part issues have provided the Belgians with a motor ambulance, and are now maintaining ten of the Serbian boys who survived the retreat into Albania in October 1915. A young Britons' League of Help has also been established in connection with the publication.

Whilst written primarily for children, this clearly written and accurate and profusely illustrated picture of events need by no means be despised by the general reader.

Each volume is attractively bound in canvas with coloured frontispiece.

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CHAPTER XIII.

SOLDIERS' STORIES OF THE RETREAT.

YOU want no assurance from me that in the encounters which I have described our men sold their ground very dearly. The story of every fight in this war is resplendent with the valour and self-sacrifice of our soldiers, but never did it shine so brightly as during the retirement in which we were now engaged. With Spartan fortitude they freely gave their lives to hold up the tidal wave of Germans that flowed over and around them, and thus enabled their comrades to make good their retreat. When, a few days later, his Majesty the King visited the battle-front, he conversed with many of the men who had done deeds of the most wonderful bravery during this time of awful stress. He talked, for example, with Highlanders of the 51st Division, and heard from their own lips the tale of their terrible experiences. Some of the officers told him that during the rearguard actions many of the men were tired to death with days of continuous fighting; yet when called upon to make one last effort, they staggered to their feet and fell upon the enemy once more.

From men of the Duke of Wellington's West Riding Regiment he heard how at Bucquoy they were assaulted five times, through the day and the night, by Prussian Guards, who had been ordered to capture the position at all costs, yet had been beaten off with frightful loss. He heard how a platoon of the Yorkshire Light Infantry had been surrounded but had refused to surrender, and had fought on until every man was either dead or wounded. Similar incidents were quite common during the great battle.

He also heard the story of a gunner officer in an observation post who sent back telephone messages to headquarters during

The Visit of King George to the Troops on the Western Front.

(British official photograph.)

His Majesty the King visited the Western front during the great German onslaught, and greatly encouraged our men by his presence and kindly words. He is here seen in a village behind the lines. As the little royal carriage on his car was seen, the French peasants joined in the cheering.



an attack. "There are Boches in the reserve line," he said; and, after a short pause, he continued, "There are Boches in my trench." At last came the message, "They are bombing my post," after which the brave voice was silent for ever. From men of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders he heard of the German attacks near Hermies, and of the shambles which our men created in the sunken road by Demicourt. The German Guards who were sent against them advanced not in steel helmets, but wearing the "piklehaube," as though on parade. Some of them belonged to the famous "Cock-chafers," the regiment which was cut up by Welshmen at Pilkem ridge.

He was also told that there were heavy guns in Beauvois when the Germans advanced, and that the Highlanders determined to save them. That night they pushed forward along with their tractors, and with Germans all round them hitched their caterpillars to the guns and brought them out—every one—under the very noses of the enemy.

Some of the Highlanders of the 51st Division told the King how they crossed the old battlefield of the Somme, with its thousands of little white crosses telling of brave men who had fallen in former battles. They were so weary that they leaned against each other, and some of them held hands like children. At every halt, however brief, they fell into deep slumber. One of them had a strange story to tell. While they were trudging to the rear a small balloon fell amongst them. It came from the enemy, and attached to it was a friendly message : "Good old Fifty-first Division. Sticking it yet. Cherio!" That balloon and the message passed into the possession of a Scottish sergeant, who would not part with it for any gold that could be offered.

Grim accounts of rearguard actions also came from the Manchesters and other Lancashire troops who had won the praise of the Commander-in-Chief for their splendid pluck and steadiness. The names and deeds of all the regiments which covered themselves with glory in the battle would occupy many of these pages. Irishmen—Ulstermen, Inniskillings, Royal Irish Rifles, and others from the Emerald Isle—played their part no less gallantly. Nothing, however, was nobler or more tragic than the last stand of the Manchesters in a redoubt called after their name near St. Quentin. Even when the enemy

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was all round them they held on, and their machine guns never ceased to fire. By means of a buried cable they were able to get messages through to the rear for some time. The last words were received from the commander, at about 3.20 in the afternoon. He was wounded, but he spoke calmly and even cheerily, though his message was that his men could not hold out much longer, as nearly every one of them had been hit, and the Germans were swarming around. The last words heard from him just before the redoubt was overwhelmed will for ever be an inspiration to his gallant regiment : "The Manchesters will defend the redoubt to the last moment."

Canadian armoured cars did fine work in delaying the advance of the Germans. Several times cars belonging to the Canadian Motor Machine Gun Corps were found fighting alongside Tanks, and more than once they followed in the wake of the monsters. The Canadian cars were frequently concealed in ruined buildings until sections of Germans had passed by. Then they came out, and drove down on the enemy with all their guns going. They also did useful work in bringing up ammunition and petrol, and in carrying off disabled men. One of those rescued was a badly-wounded British brigadier, who was described by a Canadian sergeant as "the pluckiest officer I ever saw. He had stayed with a little post of about a dozen men right to the last, and when the machine-gun crew were laid out he fired the gun himself until he was badly hit. He made us leave him with a field ambulance, and wouldn't let us take him to a casualty clearing station. 'Go back and give it to 'em hot,' were his parting words to me."

* * * * *

It is said that during the battle German agents in British uniforms managed to slip through our lines, and by means of all sorts of lying reports greatly disturb the minds of the French villagers. As the Germans advanced, many of these poor people were forced to leave their homes and for the second time trek westward. East of Péronne every village had been destroyed by the Germans during their retreat in the spring of 1917; but further south many of the villages had been restored, and the farmers had again begun to cultivate their little fields. All these had now to be abandoned. Some of the refugees were withdrawn by train; others, with their household goods



A Knight-Errant on Wheels.

(From the picture by F. Matania. By permission of *The Sphere*.)

The poor people who were driven from their homes by the German advance were helped in their flight by French and British troops. A British motor cyclist is here seen giving a lift to an old French lady.

piled upon farm carts, and their wives and children trailing behind, made their way slowly and painfully along the roads to the rear. Amongst all the sad sights of war there are fewer more heartbreaking than to see whole families, deprived of their homes and means of livelihood, trudging wearily away from the guns, and not knowing where to lay their heads.

* * * * *

The German Kaiser, who had placed himself in chief command of the great offensive and had declared that it was his battle, sent the following telegram to his Empress on Saturday :—

“ Pleased to be able to tell you that, by the grace of God, the battle at Monchy, Cambrai, St. Quentin, and La Fère has been won. The Lord has gloriously aided. May He further help.—WILHELM.”

The same evening another dispatch set the church bells ringing and the flags flying all over Germany :—

“ The first stage of the great battle in France is ended. . . . A considerable part of the British army is beaten.”

I need not tell you that the statement in the last sentence was quite untrue. We had suffered a great reverse, but our forces had not been beaten. For an army to be beaten means that it has been put out of action and rendered incapable of fighting again. Our line had fallen back, but it was unbroken, and was ready to continue the fight at any moment. The eagerness of the Kaiser to claim a victory before his work was done could only be explained by the necessity for heartening his own people and preparing them for the awful tale of losses which would soon have to be unfolded.

* * * * *

I will conclude this chapter by rapidly summing up the results of the four days' fighting. When the battle opened the Allied armies were facing the Germans along a trench line extending from the North Sea to the Alps. Along this line the enemy had been besieged for more than two years. The northern half of the line was held by British forces, the southern half by French armies, and the junction between them lay along the valley of the river Oise. While the enemy was forced to fight on the Russian front he held his Western line with difficulty, because he had to divide his forces. Constant inroads were made upon his Western front, and though he held

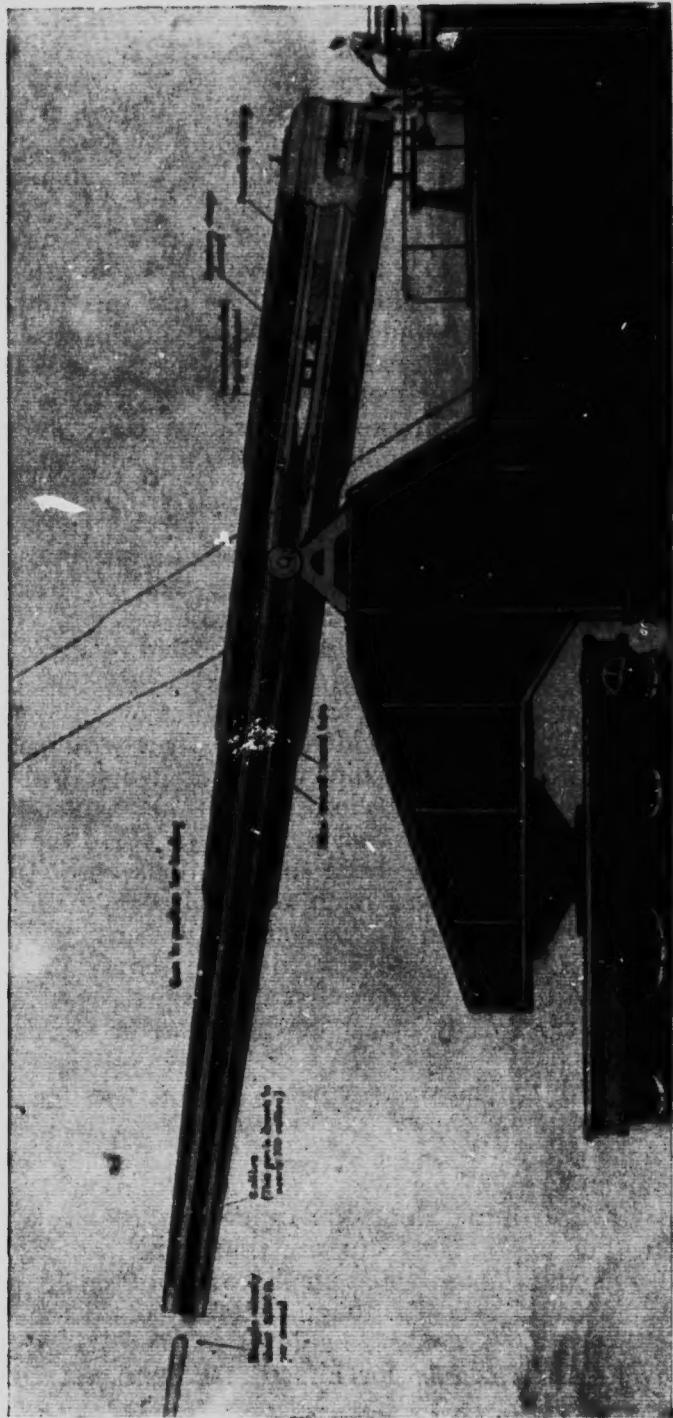
it stubbornly he was obliged to give ground both in front of Ypres and in the region to the north and south of Arras.

When, however, Russia proved faithless and abandoned the Allied cause, he was no longer obliged to maintain his armies on the Eastern front. He was, therefore, able to transfer large forces to the West, and to give his whole attention to the war on that front. How should he use this new and unexpected advantage? Should he strike, or should he simply hold on and, as soon as the season served, assail the Italians on their weak line, and force yet another of the Allies to make peace with him? Delay in the West and an early offensive in Italy seemed to be his best policy. His submarine campaign was going well: he was sinking British and neutral ships faster than they could be built, and was thus gravely hampering his chief opponent in supplying herself with food and in transporting munitions to her armies. Further, he had not much to fear from the Americans for many months to come.

To the surprise of many observers, he decided to strike with all the force that he could muster, and make a desperate effort to force a victorious peace before the spring was over.

We can only guess why he decided to make this great gamble. It may have been that the hardships which his people had been forced to endure, and the terrible losses which they had suffered, had so worked upon them that they were crying aloud for peace at any price; or it may have been that relations with Austria were so strained that she was ready to break away and make peace on her own account. Whatever the reasons may have been, they were evidently sufficient to make the High Command stake everything on a great adventure, the issue of which would be either the speedy defeat of the Allies or Germany's ultimate ruin.

Where should the blow be struck? That was the next question. No student of war could fail to see that a blow upon the right of the British front, as near as possible to the point where the French took over the line, promised the best results. A mighty thrust along the valley of the Oise would, if successful, cut off the British from the French, and at the same time give the enemy a left flank which he could easily defend. If he could smash through and get round the flank of the British army, he would be able to roll it up northward and destroy it. Fortunately for him, the ground over which



Probable Appearance of the German Gun which bombarded Paris.

(By permission of *The Sphere*.)

The gun is said to be mounted on a triple track railway. It is here shown as in the position for loading. The barrel is drawn in section, in order to show the inner tube. One shell is shown ready for discharge, with its big charge behind it; another shell is seen leaving the muzzle, with a probable velocity of 5,200 feet per second.

he proposed to attack was firm and hard as the result of a long spell of dry weather.

He knew that in sending his troops against the seasoned British he would suffer terrible losses ; but he was ready to make a great sacrifice. He believed that his losses would be well worth while if success crowned his efforts. Never had so much been staked upon a single enterprise. If he won, the lordship of the world was his ; if he failed, he would seriously cripple himself for future operations, and would probably ensure his own defeat.

Soon after the offensive began several German newspapers gave an account of the preparations. It is said that when the decision was made that there should be a mighty onslaught on the British, Hindenburg sent Ludendorff all along the front, from north to south, to find "the best point for a break-through." The preparations were begun at the end of January. They were not easy, because they had to be concealed as much as possible, in order that the British might not suspect anything.

First of all, accurate maps were made on which every road and its condition were shown. Then new roads were constructed and old roads were improved. Cross-roads were made, so that at least two routes were available for every army corps. Most of this engineering work had to be done by night, when the British airmen could not see what was going on. When all was completed a book of one hundred pages was prepared ; it was illustrated with sketch-maps, and gave full instructions as to how the offensive was to proceed. Every company commander received a copy of this book.

Early in March the Germans, so we are told, quietly began bringing up munitions as near as possible to the British lines. At that time our men must have noticed what was on foot, for during the following nights the area was flooded with British airmen, who tried with the help of lights to find out what preparations were being made. Here and there they hit and exploded a munition dump, but most of the stores, according to the account which I am quoting, remained uninjured. Nevertheless, increased uneasiness showed itself in the British camp, and the London newspapers began to publish statements that the enemy was preparing a great attack between Arras and St. Quentin. They thought it would begin on 10th March, and all that night the British guns were busy.

A few days later the real movement of German troops began ; it took seven nights of marching. At this time the heavy guns and bomb-throwers had already been brought up to the front. "The British now understood that we were in earnest, but staff maps which we have captured show that they did not realize the full extent of their danger. They began, however, to withdraw their heavy guns, but were interrupted in this work when the storm broke on the morning of 21st March. This date had been fixed a full month before, and was known to thousands. But they all kept the secret, so that on the historic morning of 21st March the whole enormous machine was set in motion with complete success." A captured officer's diary tells us that the Germans named 21st March Michael's Day, because it was to be the day of Michael's revenge. Michael, you will remember, is the popular name for a German, as John Bull is for an Englishman.

The enemy struck hard along a fifty-mile line from the Scarpe to the Oise, but only at one point did he break through, and even then he could not destroy the unity of the British line. His stubborn opponents, losing terribly but still intact and undismayed, swung back their line like a trap-door on its hinges ; and as it receded the French filled up the gap on the south, and kept contact with it. At the end of four days of the fiercest and bitterest fighting ever known, and after his legions had been mown down like grass before the scythe, his main object was unfulfilled. He had gained ground ; he had thrust his enemy back across bare and devastated country, pock-marked with shell-holes and dotted with the ruins of small towns and villages ; he had captured many prisoners, many guns, and much war material. He had won a great success, but he had not turned the British army, and that was the chief object of his assault. Until he could break through our line he was only dashing his head against a stone wall.

On Saturday, 23rd March, at half-past seven in the morning, the roar of an explosion brought the Parisians out of their beds in a state of great bewilderment. A huge shell had fallen upon the capital. Thereafter, at intervals of about fifteen minutes, shells continued to fall until half-past two. At three o'clock it was announced that ten persons had been killed and fifteen

injured. Whence had the shells come? The point in the German lines nearest to Paris was about seventy miles away. Surely the enemy had no gun which could carry so far? Before long, however, all doubts were dispelled, and it was clear that the Germans had constructed a gun capable of hurling a shell some 300 pounds in weight for seventy-five miles.

Day by day the bombardment continued, and each day added to the toll of dead and injured. The Parisians, however, were not dismayed. On Good Friday a shell hit one of the churches during the three hours' service, just at the ninth hour of our Lord's agony.

Next day Cardinal Amette, Archbishop of Paris, made the following protest:—

"Yesterday, Good Friday, at the very hour of the death of our Lord Jesus Christ, when the faithful were gathered in the churches to celebrate the great mystery, the Germans resumed their bombardment of Paris, after several days' interruption. A shell fell on one of our churches, and the vaulted roof fell in, killing at least seventy-five persons and injuring ninety others, chiefly women and children. Such a crime, committed in such circumstances on such a day and at such an hour, arouses deep indignation in every heart. In an hour of profound grief it is our duty to appeal to the justice of God, and to implore His compassion for the victims."

A French member of Parliament who visited the church shortly afterwards tells us that he will never forget the horror of the scene. Firemen and volunteers, mostly soldiers on leave, were already at work. The dead and dying, the battered and torn, were being carried out, amidst the cries and tears of their relatives and friends. On the steps of the church there were pools of blood. Yet on that very morning the German Emperor had sent to Krupps, the manufacturers of the weapon that had done the hideous mischief, a letter warmly congratulating the firm on having produced this "achievement of German science and labour."

The experts at once began studying the new gun, though none of them had seen it, and before long were able to give us some information which may or may not be correct. They told us that the gun was of enormous length, probably about seventy feet or more. As an ordinary gun of such length would not be able to withstand the strain of firing, a tube

8.2 inches across was either inserted into the outer tube, or some other method was adopted to give it the necessary strength: The shell itself was about twenty inches long, but a false conical-shaped cap attached to it increased its length to thirty-six inches. It had a fuse at the nose and another at the base, so that it would be sure to burst when it struck its target. The outside of the shell was rifled so as to add to its velocity when leaving the gun. Its walls were very thick in proportion to the length, and the inner chamber was divided into two compartments, each stored with explosives. The object of dividing the explosive chamber into two was to lessen the risk of an explosion inside the gun, due to the sudden jerk of its discharge.

In former pages I have described the howitzer, which fires at a high angle of elevation and plunges down upon its target. Such weapons do not discharge their shell with a high velocity. The novelty of the new gun was that it applied high velocity to a high-angle gun. Its muzzle was tilted at an angle of about sixty degrees, and by means of a charge of perhaps 400 lbs. of slow-burning powder the shell was hurled out of the gun at a velocity of somewhere about 5,200 feet, or not far short of one mile, per second. The shell rapidly passed upwards through the denser air into the lighter air, where it met with but little resistance, and its remaining velocity was sufficient to carry it over the rest of its long journey. It is said that the shells travelled to a height of about twenty miles, and that they took from two and a half minutes to three minutes to reach the Paris area.

At first the bursting of the shells in Paris caused great alarm; but before long the citizens became used to the new sensation, and went about their ordinary business just as usual. They nicknamed the new gun "Big Bertha," because it was manufactured by the firm of Krupps, which is owned by Frau Bertha Krupp von Bohlen, "the cannon queen."

You must not suppose that the new guns only gave trouble to the French, or that they were permitted to do their fell work unmolested. One, or perhaps more of them, burst, and killed many of the gunners. Meanwhile French aviators were trying to discover the whereabouts of the monsters, and French artillerymen were turning their weapons on all the places where they were likely to be hidden. On 3rd May, for example, air squadrons were up all day directing the work of the French

guns. Though the Germans fiercely bombarded them, they were able to keep the air, and to regulate the fire. Photographs which were taken that day showed that four large shells made hits and completely shattered the emplacement of one of the huge guns. The railways on which these heavy pieces were carried were also broken up in many places. Writing on 5th May, a Paris journalist said :—

"When the Germans started bombarding Paris they had a battery of three of these giants on the shoulder of the Mont de Joie. The first was put out of action six weeks ago. Another was damaged ten days ago—though not put out of action entirely—and its crew was killed. That left one, and this has now been destroyed (as described above), though, doubtless, the Germans will replace their losses."

In this country we began to imagine what would happen if the enemy reached Calais or Dunkirk and installed his great guns on the shores of the Straits of Dover. The little map on this page shows you the portion of south-east England which could be assailed by these huge weapons. You will notice that the eastern part of Sussex, nearly the whole of Kent, and the coast region of Essex as far north as Harwich, would be within range, and that at Greenwich shells would fall on Greater London.



Area swept by 75-mile Gun at Calais.

CHAPTER XIV.

ACROSS THE SOMME.

IN a former chapter I told you that retreat was forced upon us by the piercing of our Fifth Army, which had been entrusted with the line extending from the little river Omignon to La Fère, a distance of some 100,000 yards. This was the weakest part of our front. We had only taken it over from the French in January, and its defences were not strong. Further, we could only garrison it with fourteen divisions—that is, with a force of about 126,000 men.

Fiercely assailed from the north by von der Marwitz and from the east by von Hutier, no less than forty German divisions were flung against it. Such overwhelming numbers could not be resisted even by British valour and endurance. The bravest of men cannot oppose an avalanche. The enemy pressed his attack hour by hour, and during the two following days hurled an additional ten or eleven divisions into the fray, so as to maintain the strength of his push. By what is called the "leap-frog" method, he sent these new divisions through those which had gained ground and had grown weary, and thus was able to keep up a ceaseless drive.

I have already brought down the story of our disaster to the evening of Sunday, 24th March. By nightfall of that day the Germans claimed that they had crossed the Somme at many points. While our men were retreating, it was hoped that along this river they would be able to hold up the enemy's advance. In all ages the Somme has been a strong line of defence; it has always been the great military obstacle of North France. Look at the map and notice its course. You already know that it rises to the north-east of St. Quentin, and after flowing past that city curves southward and westward to

Ham, from which it runs northward to Péronne, after which it turns west to Amiens. Its course between St. Quentin and Amiens much resembles a pot-hook. An invader who aims at Paris from the north must cross the river either between Péronne and Amiens, or somewhere between Péronne and St. Quentin. An invader from the direction of St. Quentin who aims directly at the great railway centre of Amiens, must cross the same river somewhere between Péronne and Ham.

Thus the river is the great northern line of defence against an advance on Paris, and a barrier between St. Quentin and the sea. Should the invader, having crossed the river and having made good progress towards the capital, be checked and driven back, he must again cross the river, and, as you know, this is always a difficult operation. Over and over again in the history of France the Somme has proved a most formidable obstacle. From the days of Caesar down to the war of 1870-71 the Somme has always been a source of trouble to invaders. Let me give you one instance from British history. In the year 1346 our English king Edward III., after advancing on Paris, was forced to retreat. When he approached the Somme he found the bridges broken down and the crossing-places strongly held. Had not a French traitor led him to a ford, his army would have been trapped.

We hoped, therefore, that along the line of the Somme Gough's army would be able to make a stand. Unhappily, it was not able to do so. We know very little of what happened when the river was crossed by the Germans. We read of the

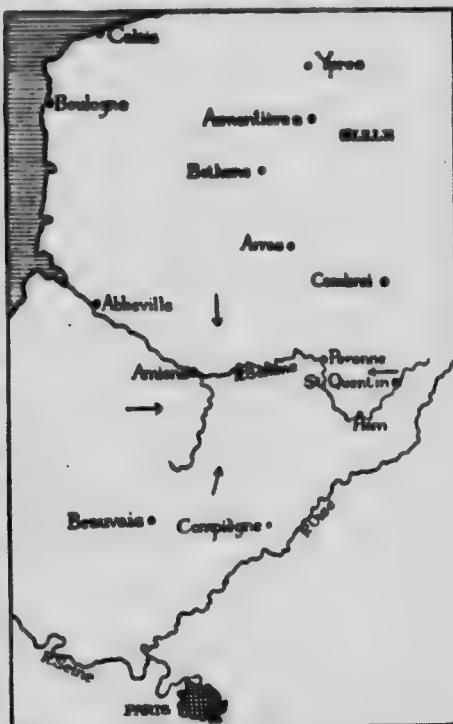


Diagram to show strategic importance of River Somme.

When he approached the Somme he found the bridges broken down and the crossing-places strongly held. Had not a French traitor led him to a ford, his army would have been trapped.

enemy trying to push rafts and pontoons across the stream, and of our artillery destroying them in the act. On 9th April, in the House of Commons, the Prime Minister told us that the line of the river was held until the Germans brought up their guns ; but he also said that our failure to withstand the enemy was due to the fact that the bridges had not been completely destroyed. Whatever may have been the reason, the enemy carried this great military obstacle more rapidly than any other invader of history.

All day Sunday the Germans made rapid progress. General Byng fought hard to keep Bapaume ; but after a battle lasting all night, and described by the Germans as "bitter," he was forced to fall back to the Ancre. On Sunday morning the Germans re-entered Bapaume. Farther south Combles also fell, and the enemy was once more in the centre of that Somme battlefield from which we had driven him in the latter half of the year 1916. I am sure that you can realize the feelings of our men as they trudged to the rear and saw one by one the scenes of their former victories fall into the hands of the enemy. The villages which had given their names to famous battles no longer existed ; a rubbish heap or a mound or a signpost alone marked the site. A correspondent thus describes the condition of this old battlefield :—

" Here were our old deserted trenches, which Nature had filled with long grass and weeds. There were the shell-craters of old strife with wild flowers growing in them ; shreds of barbed wire on the edge of belts of ground which had once been No Man's Land ; tumbled-down dug-outs and sandbag parapets rotted by the frost ; everywhere there were signs of former conflict, and here and there little cemeteries in which slept our dear remembered dead."

Farther south on this black day von Hutier's troops forced a passage across the Somme below Ham, and captured Nesle, three and a half miles west of the river. Still farther south the French infantry, which had been brought up at top speed on the 23rd, were pushed back. Chauny, half-way between La Fère and Noyon, fell into German hands ; the latter town was abandoned, and the French took up strong positions on the north bank of the Oise. I have already told you that but for the prompt appearance of the French reserves the road to Paris would have been open to the enemy.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BATTLE OF ARRAS.

MONDAY, the 25th of March, saw no slackening of the German advance. Von Below and von der Marwitz now joined hands, and before the close of the day had reached the line Ervillers-Miraumont-Thiepval. The red-brick town of Albert, with the image of the Virgin hanging from the tower of its church, was now threatened. You will remember this curious sight which thousands of British soldiers had gazed at with wondering eyes. On the top of the belfry stood a huge gilt wooden statue of the Virgin with the Babe in her arms. A German shell had dislodged it, but its fall had been arrested, and for many months it hung at right angles to the spire, looking down on the town below. This curious incident had given rise to a legend: "The day the Virgin of Albert falls the war will come to an end." Alas! the statue fell during the bombardment which began on the 25th, but when it fell the end of the war seemed to be as far off as ever.

West of Péronne the Germans on the same day crossed the Somme from the north, and pushed along both banks of the river. Farther south the French fell back from the north bank to the south bank of the Oise.

Next day, to continue the dismal story, Albert fell, and our line was roughly that on which we stood when we began our Big Push on July 1, 1916. The enemy was still advancing, and he claimed that so far he had captured 963 guns and 100 Tanks.

On Wednesday, the 27th, the German advance began to slacken. Our reinforcements had arrived, and we were no longer fighting against heavy odds. It was clear that the

enemy had been forced by his severe losses to take many of his broken divisions out of the firing line and reorganize them. From that day onward his progress was much slower, and it came to a standstill in this region on 1st April.

Now let us move on to 28th March, when the enemy side-slipped some of his forces northward, and made a terrific attempt to break down the hinge of the British defence. I have likened our retreat to the swinging back of a trap-door upon its hinges. These hinges were our positions in front of Arras, and the jamb of the door was the Vimy Ridge. The Germans had so far failed to accomplish their main object. They had neither separated us from our Allies, nor had they cut off our armies from each other. Though we had yielded much ground, especially in the south, we had practically stood fast in the north, and our line was unbroken. The German High Command now set itself the task of breaking through at Arras. If it could do this, it would be able to turn the Vimy Ridge, which, as you know, was the buttress of our line both to the north and to the south.

The Battle of Arras began at 5.30 on the morning of Thursday, 28th March. At that hour the enemy's storm troops advanced against our First Army, which lay astride the Scarpe, and was under the command of General Horne. Seven divisions were flung against our positions north of the river, and three against those south of the river. For almost the first time during the great offensive we were able to meet the enemy on an equal footing, especially north of Arras. Our trenches lay on the forward slope of the ridge which falls to the plain of Douai, and we had a clear view across the country. We could see every yard of the ground across which the Germans had to advance, and happily there was no mist to shroud them from our view.

Long before the Germans appeared their guns had begun a fierce bombardment, which blew our forward posts out of existence. Gas shells were sent over in great numbers, and trench mortars hurled bombs against our wire. Then our guns began their work. They shelled the assembling stations of the enemy, and did great execution. A correspondent greatly praises our gunners, not only for their work on this day, but for their endurance and devotion throughout the long struggle. He says:—



The Belfry at Albert, with the Virgin and Babe hanging from its Tower.
(Official photo.)

"I have seen some of them in action during the fighting, and have marvelled at their coolness. At times their officers are hoarse with shouting 'Fire!' and dazed from lack of sleep. Nevertheless they are always clear-headed enough to see a S.O.S. signal and get a straight target."

Under the fierce German bombardment our men withdrew to their main line of defence, and soon saw the enemy advancing from the villages of Arleux, Oppy, and Gavrelle. They came on in dense masses, as though on parade, shoulder to shoulder; but there was no dashing forward, as each man was heavily weighted with a pack, and carried six days' rations, two blankets, an extra pair of boots, together with all sorts of odds and ends, and a good deal of ammunition. Loaded like mules, the men could not move easily through the craters and the entanglements. Their officers went forward with walking sticks, and pointed out the gaps in the wire.

Observers tell us that the Germans came over the hill "like a cloud," turning the slopes gray. To the watching soldiers they seemed to be a huge mob. As the shells from British guns burst among them there were movements in this direction and in that, surges forward and surges backward. The day was brilliant, and our gunners had excellent observation. The gray masses wilted down before our rifle and gun fire, and in most parts of our front no Germans reached our main line of defence save as prisoners. An eye-witness writes:—

"We mowed them down like sheep, but fresh waves kept looming behind the men who died. The experience of some London Rifle Brigade lads will show what happened in our forward trenches. They were far quicker in action than their heavily-laden foes. When the flood poured over the first parapet, the Londoners yielded a bit of trench, then blocked it up and fought from the farther side. As the flood extended, so they fell back a yard at a time, throwing bombs and firing rifles point-blank, sometimes so close that they nearly drove scorched cloth into the gray figures tightly wedged along the narrow alleys. Those who fell never got up again. They were held down by the dead and wounded, or trampled upon by comrades pressing forward to meet their doom.

"The officers of the riflemen were as busy as the privates. The commander and his adjutant lay along the parapet beside two machine guns, which were pouring a continuous stream of bullets along the trench. They fired 600 belts of cartridges between them in the first hour of the attack. 'You simply couldn't miss them,' said one of them afterwards. The phrase was common in the mouths of men at other parts of the front."

The failure of the attack was assured in the early morning,

but until nearly sunset the "cannon-fodder" were sent forward to their death. By the time darkness fell upon the field the Germans had advanced barely a mile, at an awful loss of life. The ground which they had won was carpeted with their dead. But even this slender gain could not be held, for from the higher ground behind the shells from our guns crashed among them, while from every crater machine guns continually kept up a death-rattle. "It was like sitting at a window and shooting into a crowded street," said an observer. Broken and dejected, the Germans fell back in the darkness and tried to entrench the ground which they had so dearly won.

The attack made more ground along the Scarpe, but even there the gains were not worth the awful cost in human life. At Rouex a splendid stand was made. We there held the fortified ruins of the chemical works. Seaforths were inside, and though surrounded and out of touch with their brigade for hours, fought on, and at length cut their way through the enemy and joined their comrades. Equally heroic was the defence of troops from Essex. They, like the Manchesters, sent back a glorious message, "We shall fight to the last man."

On the extreme right south of the Cambrai road the struggle was very severe. The Germans swept down upon our lines in such numbers that our outposts were overwhelmed, and there was a deadly struggle round two battalion headquarters. At one of these posts the Germans were thrown back several times, and for nearly eight hours the doubtful battle raged. Not till after nine o'clock was our prepared line crossed. When the fierce day came to an end the hinges were still intact. Though they had been somewhat bent back south of Arras, they were far from giving way. That ancient, war-worn city, with memories of battle going back to Julius Cæsar and to Attila with his Huns, was still ours.

CHAPTER XVI.

A TRIBUTE FROM THE ENEMY.

SHAKESPEARE tells us "thrice is he armed that hath his quarrel just," and Tennyson makes his Sir Galahad sing:—

" My strength is as the strength of ten,
Because my heart is pure."

In all their heavy trials and bitter disappointments the British people were nerved to their task by the proud knowledge that they entered into the war with "clean hands and a pure heart." They knew that in August 1914 Britons all over the world were eager to live in peace and concord with their neighbours. They knew that their rulers coveted neither the land nor the gold of any other nation, and they themselves were fully content with their own "fair and goodly heritage." They sought peace and ensued it; and instead of giving occasion for quarrel amongst the nations, went out of their way to settle old disputes with them, and pave the way for a better understanding on all matters which might lead to war.

As you know, we threw down the gage of battle with the greatest reluctance. Not until the Germans had proved themselves false to their most sacred promises, and had determined to invade the little state which they had solemnly sworn to protect against all comers, did we draw the sword. Not until it was clear that Germany meant to hack her way through that peaceful and innocent land, in order to beat France to her knees before the Russians were able to take the field, did we decide that the quarrel was ours. It is said that the Prime Minister was moved to tears when he knew that there was no other way. But he was foremost in declaring that if we stood by with folded arms, and thus made ourselves partners in this

tragic triumph of "force over law, and of brutality over freedom," we should be for ever dishonoured. Ninety-nine out of every hundred Britons believed that never in the whole course of their history had they engaged in a more righteous war ; that, indeed, it was a Holy War to which they were called. They were not fighting for material things, but were struggling to maintain that good faith amongst the nations without which the world would sink back into barbarism.

Now, strange to say, while the British were certain that they were fighting for honour and freedom and justice, the great mass of the German people had been deluded into the belief that they too were engaged in a righteous war. While their rulers for many years past had been straining every nerve to make their armies invincible, so as to become the supreme Power of the world ; while their munition shops were working night and day to pile up armaments ; while their spies were going to and fro gathering information which would serve them in time of war ; while their officers were toasting "The Day" at their messes, the docile German people were being schooled in the greatest lie of history.

The emperor, the princes, the ministers, the clergy, the professors in the universities, the teachers in the schools—all combined to make the people believe that Britain, France, and Russia were preparing a treacherous attack upon them, and were only awaiting a favourable moment to destroy them. France, they were told, wanted revenge : she meant to recover the provinces which had been reft from her in the war of 1870-71. Russia was a wolf always ready to join in a hunt after prey, and Britain was jealous of the great trade which Germany had built up. "Revengeful France, barbaric Russia, and envious England" were united in a dark, deadly plot against the innocent and peace-loving Fatherland.

The German people were constantly told that the chief villain and the guiding spirit of this wicked conspiracy was Sir Edward Grey, the British Foreign Minister. He, with deep cunning, had encircled Germany with enemies, and was now prepared to deal her a death-blow. It was quite easy to make the German people believe that Britain was at the bottom of the mischief, for they had long been trained to hate her, and to regard her as *the enemy*. The Germans are a very patriotic race—they dearly love their country—and it is not surprising that, believing the



A Massed German Attack in front
(From the picture by D. Macpherson.)

Observers tell us that the Germans came over the hill "like a cloud," turning the slopes gray. To there were movements in this direction and in that, surges forward and surges backward. The gray the attack never reached a point nearer than from one hundred to two hundred yards from our lines. The



of the Ancient City of Arras.

By permission of *The Sphere*.

the watching soldiers they seemed to be a huge mob. As the shells from British guns burst among them masses wilted down before our rifle and gun fire, and in the part of the front shown in the above picture time was early afternoon, and the whole hillside was lighted up with brilliant sunshine.

Fatherland to be encompassed by foes and in dire danger, they were roused to a high pitch of indignation, and readily pledged themselves to fight to the death to preserve her. No doubt the disgraceful way in which they treated the British and French ambassadors when war was declared, and the awful cruelties which they practised in Belgium and North France, were the outcome of their belief that they were the victims of a dastardly plot to wipe them out of the book of nations. They refused to show mercy towards those who, as they thought, had been guilty of such treachery.

While the German people were thus being fooled by their rulers, and were being led to the slaughter in order to satisfy the world-wide ambitions of their emperor, their princes, their nobles, and their rich men, the Allies and most of the neutrals were well aware that the war had been deliberately engineered; that it had long been prepared for; and that the story of a great conspiracy against Germany had not a shred of foundation in fact. In March 1918, while the great onslaught which I have described in previous chapters was preparing, they were told the truth, not by outsiders, but by one of their own princes—the man who had been their ambassador in London, and had taken part in all the negotiations which led up to the war.

This man was Prince Lichnowsky, a German noble who, after serving in the army, was employed for four or five years at the German Foreign Office, and in September 1912 was sent to London to represent his country at the Court of St. James's. He was an honest, able, agreeable, and popular man, and he formed friendships with most of our statesmen. When war broke out he had, of course, to return to Germany; but in striking contrast with the treatment of our ambassador in Berlin, we sent him away, as he himself says, "like a departing sovereign." He left London with a heavy heart, and went into retirement, where he wrote an account of his "mission to London." This pamphlet was not meant to be published, but was intended to justify his conduct to his private friends. In March 1918 extracts from his little book appeared in a Swedish newspaper, and shortly afterwards the complete work was given to the world.

In this book the Prince tells us that when he arrived in London he found a peace-loving Government in power. Sir Edward Grey, having settled all outstanding points of difference

with France and Russia, wished to make similar agreements with Germany. He wished her to become a partner with the other Great Powers in preserving the peace of the world. The Prince saw clearly that while Britain meant to maintain her friendship with France and Russia, she was eager to arrive at a friendly understanding with Germany. At this time the British people were divided into two groups—those who believed that Britain could form a friendship with Germany, and those who thought that, sooner or later, there was sure to be war between the two nations. Prince Lichnowsky tells us that even those who suspected Germany did nothing to thwart the efforts of those who hoped for and strove for German friendship.

One chapter of the Prince's book is devoted to Sir Edward Grey, for whom, it is clear, he had great respect and liking. He tells us that the simplicity and honesty of Sir Edward's ways secured him the esteem of even his opponents, and that lying and double-dealing were alike hateful to him. He gives us an example of our Foreign Minister's quiet humour. "Once when he was lunching with us and the children, and heard them talking German, he said, 'I can't help thinking how clever these children are to talk German so well.' He was much pleased with his joke." He winds up the chapter with the following striking words: "This is a true picture of the man who is decried in Germany as 'Liar Grey' and the instigator of the world war."

There is no doubt that Prince Lichnowsky, as an honest, straightforward gentleman, was chosen for his post for the purpose of deceiving us. He was put forward as the German representative—a man of charm and culture, amiable and reasonable. Behind him, however, other "dark forces" were at work. He complains that he was kept in ignorance of most important matters, and that the reports of secret agents were never sent to him. The truth is, that he was only a stalking-horse, meant to induce us to believe that he represented the real Germany. The real Germany was represented by the secret agents who were working against us in his shadow.

I now come to the most important part of the pamphlet—the story of the two months which preceded the outbreak of war. The Prince says that he had not been long in the country before he was quite sure that there was no fear of Germany being attacked by Britain. He felt quite certain that Britain

would neither make war on Germany nor help any other nation to do so. But, at the same time, he assured his Government that "*under any circumstances England would protect the French.*" He pointed out that in the event of a war between European Powers, Britain, as a commercial state, would suffer greatly, and would, therefore, do her best to prevent a conflict ; but, on the other hand, she would not permit any weakening or the wiping out of France. It is quite evident, from the course which events afterwards followed, that the Kaiser took no notice of this warning. He believed that, come what might, Britain would not fight, and he lent a ready ear to his spies, " who assured him that the troubles in Ulster would prevent Britain from going to the help of France on land."

At the end of June 1914 the Prince visited Kiel by command of the Emperor, and while on board the royal yacht heard the startling news that the Archduke Francis Ferdinand, heir to the Austrian throne, had been murdered at Sarajevo. He did not think much about the matter, but he was greatly surprised at the effect which it produced upon an Austrian count who was on board the yacht. He had remained in his cabin suffering from sea-sickness ; but on receiving the news he suddenly recovered, and appeared on deck, all smiles. " The fright of joy had cured him." The Archduke, you must remember, was a strong man, and he stood in Germany's way. He was bitterly hated by those Austrians who wished to see Germany supreme. We may, I think, take it for granted that no tears were shed for the murdered Archduke on board the Kaiser's yacht.

Soon afterwards Prince Lichnowsky went to the Foreign Office in Berlin, and discovered that General von Moltke was pressing for war, and that a high official who had advised that Austria should be generous towards Serbia had been reprimanded. Later on he learned that the Kaiser and his generals attended a conference at Potsdam on 5th July, and on that day it was decided to go to war with Russia. " The Day," so long expected, so long prepared for, was soon to arrive.

The Prince was told by his chiefs at the Foreign Office to go back to London and try to get the British newspapers to say that Austria would be quite justified in punishing Serbia for the murder of the Archduke. He pointed out that the

A Tribute from the Enemy. 141

British have always supported national movements abroad ; and that the newspapers, while quite ready to see the murderers punished, would be very unlikely to agree that Serbia ought to lose her freedom as a consequence of the crime. He advised Herr von Jagow to counsel Austria to be moderate in her demands, and said that he was quite sure that if war began it could not be confined to Serbia, but that Russia would be certain to join in on behalf of her little ally. To this Herr von Jagow replied that Russia was not ready for war, and that the more firmly Germany took sides with Austria, the more Russia would give way. Indeed, some of his advisers were of opinion that Russia would not move in any circumstances, and that Austria could go to any lengths she pleased.

Then came the famous or rather the infamous " Note " * which made such demands upon Serbia that she could not comply with them without confessing that her independence had vanished, and she was no longer master in her own house. The British newspapers agreed that the murder of the Archduke should be punished, but they would not agree that Austria had any right to rob Serbia of her independence. Most of them counselled Austria to moderate her demands. Sir Edward Grey strongly advised Serbia to come to terms with the Austrians ; and, thanks to his good offices, the Serbian minister accepted all the Austrian demands save two, and on these points he was ready to come to some agreement.

Prince Lichnowsky tells us that Sir Edward Grey went through the Serbian reply with him, and that Sir Edward proposed that the French, Italian, and German ambassadors should meet him in conference and try to reconcile the two countries. " Given good will," says the Prince, " everything could have been settled in one or two sittings. . . . I therefore strongly backed the proposal, on the ground that otherwise there was danger of the world war, through which we stood to gain nothing and lose all." His efforts were in vain. His masters told him plainly that any such conference would be degrading to Austria. He was to try to get Britain to agree that the war must be waged by Austria and Serbia alone. A mere hint from the German ministers to the Austrian ministers would have been sufficient to make the latter accept the Serbian

* See Vol. I., pp. 30-32. In connection with this subject, Chaps. I. and II. of Vol. I. should be reread.

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reply. "*This hint was not given; on the contrary, they urged in the direction of war.*"

"After our refusal," says the Prince, "Sir Edward requested us to submit a proposal. *We insisted on war.*" The only reply which the Prince could obtain from his master in Berlin was that Austria had behaved very well in not demanding some Serbian territory. Sir Edward pointed out that even if Austria did not take some of Serbia, her demands would make Serbia a vassal state. Russia would never permit this, and would be sure to fight in Serbia's defence.

Then the Prince goes on to say that he now began to feel sure that the Kaiser and his advisers "wanted war under any circumstances." There was no other way of explaining their action. The urgent requests and the definite promises of the Russian Foreign Minister, "the positively humble telegrams of the Tsar," Sir Edward Grey's repeated attempts to bring the parties together, the efforts of the Italians, and his own strong counsels—all were of no avail. "Berlin stood firm: Serbia must be massacred."

On 28th July Austria declared war on Serbia, and Russia partially mobilized her forces. Next day Sir Edward Grey warned the Kaiser that if France should be attacked he was not to count on Britain standing aside. Then events moved rapidly. The Austrian Foreign Minister, who so far had been guided by Germany, and had stood out for the strict demands of the Note, now gave way, and said that he was ready to negotiate with Serbia and Russia. There was thus a gleam of hope that war might be averted. Germany saw her chance slipping away, and on the 31st sent an impudent message to Russia ordering her to demobilize within twelve hours. This Russia refused to do, and on the afternoon of 1st August Germany declared war on Russia, which meant, of course, war on France as well. The world war had begun.

Prince Lichnowsky has no doubt whatever that his own country was solely responsible for the war. He brings the following charges against Germany:—

1. We (the Germans) encouraged the Austrians to attack Serbia.

2. Between 23rd and 30th July, when the Russians told us that they would not tolerate an attack on Serbia, we refused to help Britain to work for peace, although Serbia was willing



Prince Karl Max Lichnowsky,

German Ambassador to the Court of St. James's from 1912-14, and the author of the book
My London Mission, which ascribes the outbreak of the world war to the deliberate designs of
Germany.

to accept almost the whole of the Note, and the Austrians were prepared to content themselves with the Serbian reply.

3. On 30th July, when the Austrians wanted to come to terms, we ordered the Russians to demobilize, although Austria had not been attacked; and on 1st August we declared war on Russia, although the Tsar pledged himself that he would not order a man to march while the matters in dispute were being discussed. *We thus deliberately destroyed the chance of a peaceful settlement.*

"No wonder," says Prince Lichnowsky, "the whole of the civilized world outside Germany places the entire responsibility for the world war upon our shoulders."

He clearly understands why the enemies of Germany declared they would not rest until they had destroyed a system which was a constant threat to them. They were right in believing that the Germans glorified war as such, and did not loathe it as an evil; that the warrior caste was all-powerful in the land; and that the national idea was summed up in the following lines:—

" Dream ye of peace ?
Dream he that will ;
War is the rallying cry,
Victory is the refrain."

At the moment when Germany, owing to Russia's betrayal of her Allies, was ready to fling her whole strength against the British in the West, and make a huge effort to achieve victory at all costs, this tribute to Britain's "clean hands and pure heart" came as a cheering ray in the gloom. We knew that we were innocent of any desire to plunge the world into bloodshed, and now the German ambassador, who had been living amongst us right up to the moment when we drew the sword, came forward and denounced his own country as the sole maker of the war. His tribute was a stimulus to us to fight on, no matter what might be in store, and to resist to the death for that righteousness which alone exalteth a nation.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE THRUST AT AMIENS.

IN Chapter XV. I told you how the German attempt to break through at Arras and turn the Vimy Ridge hopelessly failed. The small amount of ground gained was of little or no consequence, and it had been won at a terrible price. The enemy, foiled in his attempt, now followed his tactics at Verdun. You will remember that when the Crown Prince failed to rush Fort Vaux he launched his second wave on the left bank of the Meuse against the Dead Man and Hill 304. The attack on the Scarpe had missed fire, and the enemy now began to prepare for a blow south of the river. He had been balked on the Oise and on the Scarpe, and he was now ready to make a determined effort to cut off Amiens.

You already know that the old city stands on the Somme, and is the most important road and railway junction of North France. The main railway line from Calais to Paris runs through its station. If this railway could be seized, or be so commanded by guns that it could not be used, the enemy would score a real success. He would deprive the Allies of their main line of communication between the Channel ports and all the front south of Amiens, and would force them to use a roundabout route which would greatly hamper the transport of troops and supplies.

Should the Germans succeed in this venture, they would, for the second time during the war, be in possession of the city. No doubt you remember that in September 1914, when von Kluck was making his great drive towards Paris, his troops occupied Amiens for a few days. The Battle of the Marne forced them to leave the city and withdraw to the line of the Aisne.

On 27th March von Marwitz ordered his forces to advance from Albert along the valley of the Ancre towards Amiens. Our guns caught them as they emerged from the town, and drove them back. On the same day an attempt was made to advance along the Somme directly towards the city, but little ground was gained. South of Amiens fierce thrusts were made in the hope of reaching the main railway, which I have already mentioned; and in the course of them Montdidier,* on the Arve, about eight miles east of the railway, was captured. The French, who were greatly outnumbered, fought very gallantly. They had only three divisions with which to withstand thirteen enemy divisions. Nevertheless, with superb courage they charged the enemy again and again; and though they could not maintain their hold of Montdidier, the enemy could make but little progress westward. When Montdidier fell, men began to tremble for the safety of Amiens. General Foch, however, restored confidence by declaring that he was ready to guarantee the safety of the city.

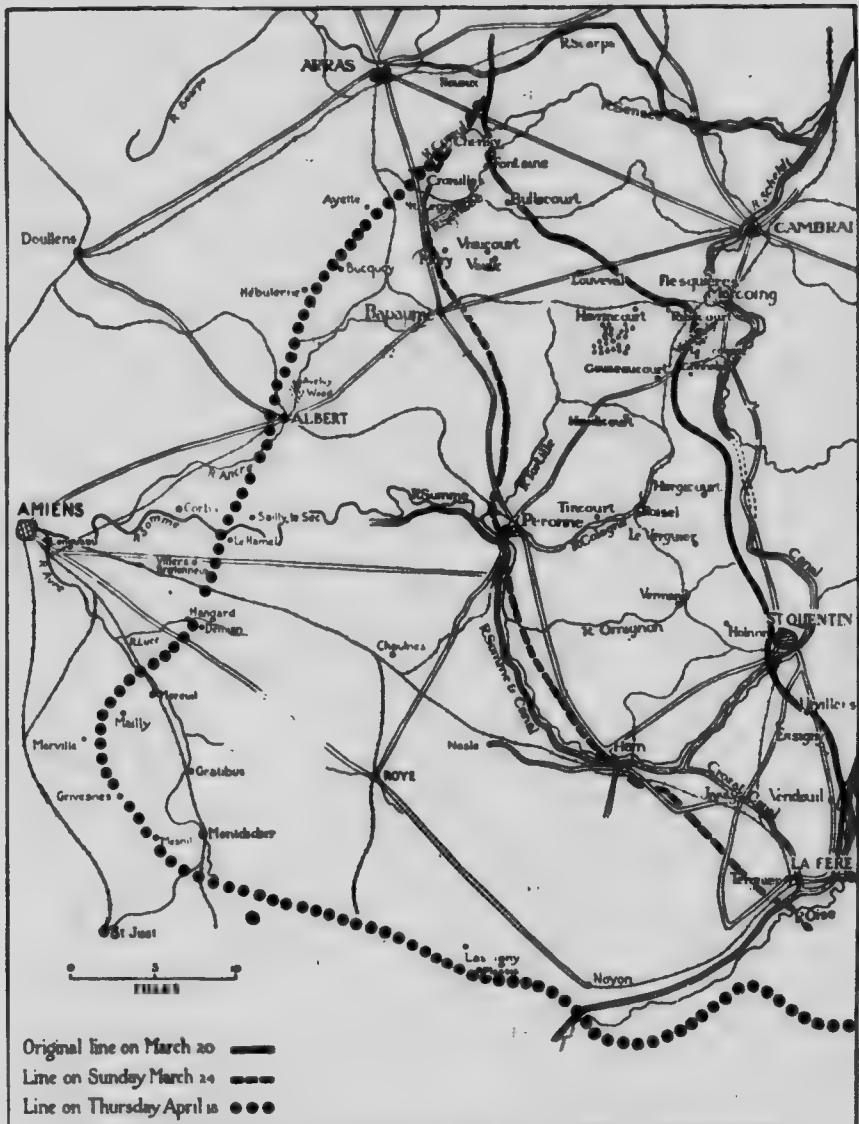
On the 29th the British and the French, fighting shoulder to shoulder, were still holding up the Germans between Montdidier and Lassigny, as I shall describe later on. The Allies fought in the best spirit of comradeship, and the French were much impressed by the contempt for danger and the great calmness of our men. A French writer two days later paid a fine tribute to our soldiers. He says:—

"As to our British friends, we must without delay trumpet the truth, so as to scatter at once the clouds with which the enemy would like to disturb our minds. All who have seen the British in the fight agree that the British soldier has fought with a courage and strength of soul which the sorrows of the hard retreat have in no way impaired. We are told of a British general who so far forgot his dignity as to fight with a rifle himself. This shows that the British withdrawal is not due to moral weakness. . . . Our General Staff trusts them as it trusts our own men."

On the same day the Allies appear to have almost recovered Montdidier, but later on they were pushed back to the heights on the west of the town, and the Germans seized several villages nearer the railway. Grivesnes,† two and a half miles west of the Arve and five miles north-west of Montdidier, was, however, the scene of a French success. The village is only five miles from the all-important railway, and its capture would mean that the

* Mon-dee-dee-ay.

† Gree-vain.



Map to illustrate the Retreat of the Allies between March 20 and April 18, 1918.

track could be constantly shelled and made impossible for the steady passage of trains. After a furious struggle, which lasted forty-eight hours, the 1st Guard Division of the enemy entered the village. Two hours later the French counter-attacked with the bayonet. A desperate hand-to-hand combat followed, and at length the Guards were driven back, and in their retirement were swept by the French machine guns. Next day they returned to the charge, but only to register another failure.

A correspondent tells us that the 29th of March "was a truly dreadful Easter day." Bright sunshine had succeeded to storm, the birds were singing, and the signs of spring were to be seen on every hand. In the villages behind the battle-line Easter bells were ringing, and little knots of villagers in their Sunday clothes were on the way to their churches. Yet everywhere in the battle-area the roads were thronged with fugitives, the guns were never silent, aeroplanes buzzed overhead, and men fought to the death.

The greatest pressure was felt in the angle between the Luce and the Arve. The Arve, as you see from the map on page 147, is a tributary of the Somme; and the Luce, which is little more than a brook, is a tributary of the Arve. Between these two rivers is a rolling country of open fields, broken by two large tracts of wood: the larger, on the north, may be called the Wood of Villers; the smaller, on the south, is known as Hangard Wood. The plateau between the rivers is the last high ground directly in front of Amiens. From its western edge the plateau falls to the great railway junction and workshops of Longeau,* which is practically a suburb of Amiens. A couple of miles to the north of Hangard Wood, and about a mile to the east of Villers Wood, is the village of Villers-Bretonneux,† which was afterwards to be the scene of many heroic combats. The enemy's object was to thrust us off this plateau and gain the commanding ground directly in front of Amiens.

Between Montdidier and Moreuil ‡ the battle raged with the utmost fierceness, but the enemy was met with a stubborn resistance. At midnight our cavalry, lying a few miles to the south-east of Amiens, were ordered to drive the Germans from Moreuil Wood, into which they had penetrated. Before morning the cavalry attacked, and the Canadians made a specially fine charge. They rose up, then dismounted and fought on

* Lon-jo.

† Bre-ton-nou.

‡ Mor-eye.

foot. By midday on the 30th they had gone clean through the wood, and had taken up a position on the Moreuil-Démuin* road.

On that day von Hutier returned to the attack, and flung his forces against the thirty-mile front between Moreuil and Lassigny. There was extremely severe fighting, and the enemy only made headway at the price of terrible losses.

A French officer thus describes the famous charge which wrested Moreuil from the hands of the enemy :—

" We had been in line since the previous night, and had met constant attacks. Twice in the night we had been forced to yield a little ground against overwhelming forces, but each time our counter-attack had restored the situation. At dawn the Germans attacked with ever-growing violence, throwing two new divisions into the battle. Though we did our best to 'stick it,' we and our British comrades had to give up one street after another, and finally to fall back 300 yards.

" Fortunately at this moment two of our regiments joined us to meet the fresh onset and to prepare for a counter-attack. We were also reinforced by a Canadian brigade.

" At 9.45 the Boches were just about to launch a fresh onslaught; but we got in first with a tremendous bayonet charge, in which the Tommies and Poilus fought shoulder to shoulder. The shock took place on the edge of the town. It was desperate hand-to-hand fighting, in which we soon got the better of the enemy, though we were one against three.

" The Canadians fought like lions. I saw two of them at grips with ten Boches. After knocking out half their foes with their knives and bayonets, they seized a bag of grenades carried by one of the Germans and began hurling the bombs among the rest.

" Two seconds later the ground was clear. In no time we were in the middle of the town again, though the enemy clung desperately to the eastern portion. By a clever turning movement from the south we soon had them at our mercy. While a hot struggle was kept up in the centre of the town, a body of French and British troops made their way round it and attacked the left flank of the enemy. Until then the Boches—they were Saxons—thought themselves masters, but when they saw us coming up on their flank they made off at the double. Very few got away.

" The British were very cool, and they amply avenged their comrades who fell in the first day of the offensive.

" I heard a huge Canadian say, as he drove his bayonet into a Boche, 'Six.' Then he went on to find a seventh. By eleven o'clock not a living Boche was in Moreuil. The streets were covered with corpses in field grey. The nearest point to Amiens which the enemy had so far reached still remained in our hands."

It was on Easter Sunday, too, that the Germans made a thrust along the valley of the little river Luce. From Hamel,

* *Day-maw-ung.*

just south of the Somme, to Hangard Wood our front was very weak ; it had to be strengthened at all costs, though troops for the purpose were hard to find. If we had not been so strong in the air that our aviators were able to keep the enemy machines from scouting over our lines, this weak place would have been discovered and the enemy hordes would have poured through it. As it was, the Germans were pushing forward patrols to test our strength prior to making an attack.

At two in the morning orders were issued to make up a force of all available men, and hold on to the line until French reliefs appeared. The command of this force was given to Brigadier-General Sandeman Carey. Before daylight the rounding-up of men for the new force had begun. The labour battalions in the neighbourhood were called upon, and they responded eagerly. In the neighbourhood there was an infantry training-school which furnished officers, men, electricians, and signallers. Royal Engineers and United States engineers also joined up, and so did men engaged in the various duties which have to be performed behind the lines. Some fifty troopers from a cavalry regiment near by also joined the scratch force, which included a number of Chinese road labourers. By noon this strangely varied assortment of men had been organized into companies and battalions, and was ready to march.

A couple of hours later they started digging in and making machine-gun emplacements. Not until the action had begun was artillery brought up. The enemy's attack was very fierce, but the scratch force behaved splendidly, and barred the road to Amiens with the utmost obstinacy. But for the odds and ends of men who took up the rifle that day the enemy might have won the city. In the course of bitter hand-to-hand fighting they were pushed back until their line bent south-westward of Villers-Bretonneux, eight and three-quarter miles east of Amiens. As they were not seasoned soldiers, we could hardly blame them had they given way. But they did nothing of the sort. They had to fall back ; but they did so fighting all the time, and luckily at this moment reliefs appeared, and the line was restored. "Carey's Army," as the force was called, had put up a splendid fight, and by its courage and devotion saved the day.

As a result of the struggle, during which the enemy suffered very heavy losses indeed, he was held along the banks

of the Arve, though he gained some ground along the Luce. On Easter Monday the battle wore itself out, and a lull of two days set in. The 2nd of April was the quietest day since the offensive began, and our line on 3rd April was much the same as it had been on 28th March. The enemy had been held up at Albert, and he had striven in vain to reach Amiens.

The lull was only a breathing space. Ludendorff was preparing for another effort to approach the city between the Somme and the Arve and secure the main railway. Enemy newspapers explained the reason of the lull. They said that the storm troops needed rest, and that time was required in which to bring up guns and supplies. One newspaper announced that the German advance had been so rapid that the various staffs could not move forward sufficiently fast to keep touch with their troops.

I now come to Thursday, 4th April, the day on which the battle blazed up again. The weather was now against the invader. A heavy mist hung over the valleys, and a cold, raw wind whistled over the hills. A bleak, depressing morning broke after a night of constant rain. The German infantry, lying in the mud of the old Somme battlefield, had been in the greatest discomfort. In the first feverish rush they had tossed aside their blankets and extra kit, and were now suffering the penalty. Behind them was a devastated country, deep in mire, and in front of them was a driven but far from dispirited enemy. They dared not light fires, lest they should attract the unpleasant attentions of our bombing parties. Altogether their plight was not to be envied.

The Crown Prince had now taken the field, and an offensive was planned along the twelve-mile front from Sailly-le-Sec, on the Somme, to Moreuil. Another effort was to be made to push forward between the Somme and the Arve, and capture the ancient capital of Picardy. At Moreuil the British and the French now linked up. A successful break-through in this region would therefore achieve the main German object, which was to divide the Allied armies. The battle opened with a very heavy bombardment all along the line; but the heavy mist interfered with the observation of the enemy's gunners and airmen, and our defences were not utterly wrecked, as in former battles. Shortly after seven o'clock the Germans poured out of the villages between the Somme and the Arve. They were



French Soldiers defending the Château and Park
(From the picture by F. Matania.)

Grivesnes, which lies to the north-west of Montdidier, was the scene of severe fighting during the battle. A French soldier, Captain Léon Gouraud, blocked the windows of the château with mattresses, and himself took a rifle to defend the position. He was one of the cream of the German army. The Germans came on in waves, fed by thick columns of men. The captain held his ground until he was killed. Then his widow then gave the order for the counter-attack, and the Poilus, to the cry of "Vive La France!" charged.



of Griveanes : the Fight round the House.

(By permission of *The Sphere*.)

latter days of March. The village was held by about 500 French infantry, commanded by a colonel, who With his 500 men he repulsed three regiments of the First Prussian Guard Division, usually considered French fought them from tree to tree in the park back to the walls of the château. The colonel from France ! " drove the Germans from the park.

instantly caught by our fire, and the first waves wavered and broke.

We had excellent command of the rolling meadows over which most of the Germans had to advance. On both sides of the Amiens-Ham railway, and in the patches of woodland, our machine gunners were posted in great numbers, and they took a very heavy toll of the advancing enemy. All the morning the Germans made fruitless efforts to advance. Fresh troops were thrust in at midday, and a fierce struggle took place in front of Villers-Bretonneux, the last important town on the road to Amiens. Australians were holding the line in front of this much-fought-for town.* In the afternoon the enemy began a terrific bombardment, which tore the streets to pieces. Then he sent wave after wave of storm troops against the right flank of the Australians. The shock overcame their line, which was bent back to the southern edge of the town. For several hours the battle raged among the woods, the copses, the ploughed fields, and along the roads, and once the town was all but lost. At the end of the afternoon, however, a British regiment and a New South Wales battalion arrived to strengthen the Australian right, and the position on the southern end of the town was saved. But for this slight retirement the British line on the right and in the centre remained intact.

Further north, at Hamel, where the woods gave the enemy a footing, we had to fall back from the village. The attackers strove desperately to reach Corbie, an old abbey town at the fork of the Ancre and the Somme; but at night they were still three miles from their goal. The Crown Prince, now in chief command, had suffered terrible losses according to his wont, and had nothing to show for them but slight dents in the British line.

To the north and south of Moreuil the Allies had to withstand very fierce blows, and the conflict did not slacken at any point while daylight lasted. The French were heavily assailed along the nine-mile front from Grivesnes to Hangard by enormous forces, which advanced with the utmost determination, especially against the villages between the Arve and the railway. The shock was sternly resisted, and thousands of the enemy were mown down. Nevertheless, it was repeated no less than ten times, with the result that a few hundred yards of ground were gained. Grivesnes was assailed with special fury, but the

* See illustration on p. 156.

assaults were held, and counter-attacks were made. At the end of the day the enemy had not reached his objective—the main railway between Amiens and Paris.

The Allies fought so stubbornly that "even the ranks of Tuscany could scarce forbear to cheer." The Germans in their report of the battle confessed that "the enemy showed desperate resistance on the whole front." They claimed that between the beginning of the offensive on 21st March and the close of the fighting on 4th April they had captured more than ninety thousand prisoners and over thirteen hundred guns.

Next day, 5th April, Sir Douglas Haig reported that the fighting along the whole front was "most severe and persistent." Attack after attack was made on Villers-Bretonneux, but without success. At the same time a big effort was made north of the Somme. North of Albert, from Ayette just south of the Cojeul to Bucquoy and Hébuterne, the Germans attacked with four fairly fresh divisions, in the hope of capturing the irregular plateau between these places.

A heavy bombardment, in which many gas shells were used, opened the engagement. Then storm troops in dense masses were pushed forward. Though they were badly cut up, they forced their way into Bucquoy,* and at the close of the day still kept a footing in one corner of the village. Nowhere, however, did they reach the highest parts of the plateau. Our line in this region still stood firm.

The other thrust was made from Albert along the Ancre. The ground rises from the western bank of the river to a ridge which gives good observation. The object of the attack was to capture this ridge. After a heavy barrage the Germans marched up the exposed face of the slope, and in doing so lost terribly. Nevertheless, by dint of numbers they succeeded in getting a foothold in Aveluy Wood, from which they were thrown back to their old positions by a counter-attack later in the day.

Australian troops lying along the railway and the hills on the north-east side of the river had a severe trial. The fight began about eight in the morning with the usual bombardment. In one part of the line, where many men had fallen under the hail of high-explosive shells, the Germans managed to break through. Advancing wave after wave, they gradually

* See illustration on pp. 184-185.



New South Wales Men at Villers-Bretonneux on the Evening of April 4th.

(From the picture by R. Caine Wardle. By permission of *The Illustrated London News*.)

During the fighting here shown the Australians killed or wounded about four thousand Germans. They were attacked by odds of four or five to one.

pushed up the hills. Australian machine guns mowed them down, but still the advance continued. The Germans flowed all round the guns, which in some cases were served to the last. The crews of one group of machine guns died at their posts after inflicting awful losses on the German hordes that swamped them.

By midday the enemy in some places was well up the slopes, though South and Western Australians on the one side, and Queenslanders on the other, were still holding out, their flanks being bent round to meet attacks which were coming almost from the rear. About four in the afternoon we launched our counter-attack. Queenslanders, men of New South Wales, South and Western Australians, and others pushed forward with deadly determination. The Queenslanders while advancing met a German wave proceeding to the attack. The two forces clashed, and the Germans were flung back at the point of the bayonet. No sooner was the first wave shattered than a second wave was encountered. This, too, was stemmed in like fashion. Fighting continued until dusk, when the Germans seemed to be too exhausted to continue the battle. The Australians, though outnumbered by four or five to one, held their own most gallantly. In Thursday's fight they claimed to have killed or wounded about four thousand Germans; in the battle of Friday they must have accounted for far more.

On Saturday, 6th April, there was again a lull on the British front. Having failed to advance after two days of hard driving, the enemy paused before beginning a new and greater attack. But while there was comparative calm on the British front, the French on the southern bank of the Oise were forced to retire to the Ailette. Before I tell you the story let me briefly review the work of the French in the Oise sector.

I have already told you that the main object of the Germans in making their advance along the Oise was to thrust in a wedge between the British and the French armies. If they could do this while they had the marshy valley of the Oise on their left flank, they could hold off the French on the south side of the river with a small force of men and guns, and roll the British northward towards the Channel. Probably, too, they had another object in view—namely, to push past Noyon down the Oise and march on Paris. This would not be difficult if the Allied armies could be separated and thrown in different



The Battle-front of General Fayolle's Army
This view is taken from a point above Ribecourt on the Oise. On the right is the famous
Lassigny should

directions—the French to the south and the British to the north.

The French first came into action on 22nd March, when our men were forced to fall back behind the Crozat Canal. On that day the Germans were close to the canal. The general of the Sixth French Army, leaving some units to guard Tergnier, close to the Oise, crossed the river and deployed in the woods behind the British, facing north-east. On the same day the Germans on his left crossed the Somme at Ham, from which a twelve-mile stretch of straight road runs to Noyon. Fighting rearguard actions, the French fell back step by step to cover this road, their right clinging to the Oise and their front facing north. When on the 24th the Germans crossed the Somme in force, the British Fifth Army had to make a further retirement. This meant that the French had to fall back too, but while doing so they continually made counter-attacks. With their



from Montdidier to the Forest of Coucy.

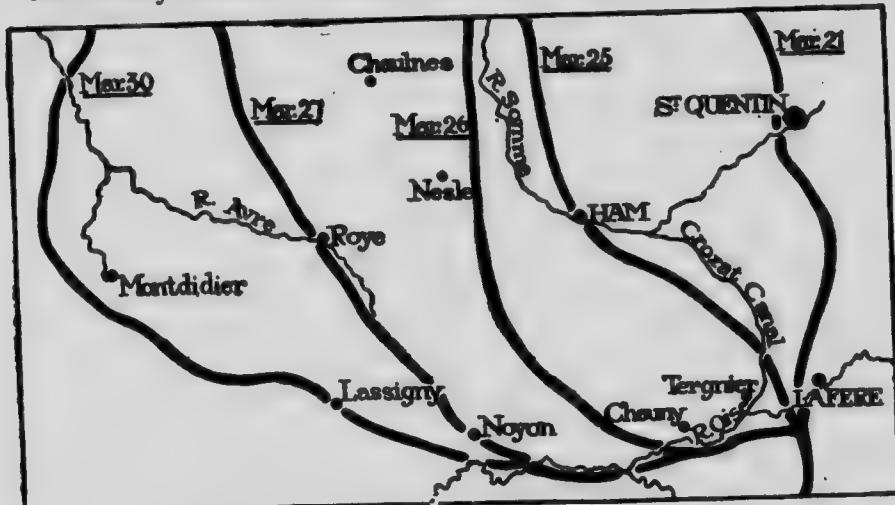
Château of Coucy; in front is Noyon, and beyond it are Roye and Nesle. The position of
be noticed.

right moving along the river towards Noyon, which was to be the pivot of their whole front, they drew back their left towards Nesle, in order to join a cavalry force and to resist the German onset with all the guns and cyclists that they could muster. In this way they linked up with the British, and covered the arrival of reinforcements, which were coming up all the time to the west of Montdidier. They checked, though they could not hold, the fierce pressure of the Germans, and meanwhile were able to build up a strong line to hold the breach.

In the evening of the 25th this line extended northward from Noyon in the direction of Chaulnes, and by the close of the next day its right was solidly established close behind Noyon. It was now easy to swing the left round on Lassigny. On the 27th some of the divisions which had been hurried up in motor lorries were brought into the line, and reinforcements were sent to the dismounted cavalry, who were defending the

villages to the west of Lassigny against the furious rushes of the Germans.

Once the French were established west of Noyon, on a line stretching round Montdidier on its left, they were confident that the door to Paris had been bolted and barred. The anxiety, however, was not yet at an end. From the 27th to the 30th the French had to check the beginning of the thrust on Amiens. By making the gatelike movement which I have described they had "shepherded" the German attack from the Oise valley towards Amiens, and the enemy was now making



Map illustrating closing of gap between Noyon and Montdidier.

his main thrust from east to west, instead of from north-east to south-west. On the 30th the Germans made a great assault on the whole line from Noyon to Montdidier. At first they were successful; but afterwards were met by a strong counter-attack, in the course of which the French captured 800 prisoners at Plessis* and Le Plémont, two villages between Lassigny and Noyon. Though later on the enemy made an advance to the west of Montdidier, our allies felt sure that he could be held in this direction.

* Play-say.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FRENCH RETIREMENT TO THE AILETTE.

I HAVE already told you (page 112) that the successful building up of a powerful battle-front while the army to the north was in rapid retreat must be considered one of the finest feats of the French army during the war. The eight days of rearguard fighting, carried on under extraordinary difficulties and against great odds, must ever be regarded as one of the great battle glories of France. Nothing but fine generalship, devoted courage, and skilful organization could have done it. Britons must always be grateful for the unselfish comradeship, the high and dauntless bravery, and the inspiring leadership which enabled a dangerous gap of thirty miles to be closed and a great German design to be nipped in the bud.

I must now describe the French retirement to the Ailette. The retreat of the British right wing on the right bank of the Oise during the first days of the offensive had left the Anglo-French troops holding an awkward salient, the north side of which was formed by the Oise and its marshes. This salient, which is shown on the little map (see page 162), was under German fire from two sides—from the north bank of the Oise, and from the Upper Coucy Forest.

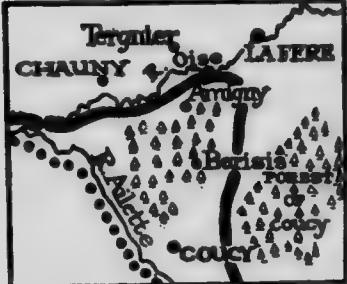
On Saturday, 7th April, the Germans forced the passage of the Oise between Chauny and La Fère, and thus breached the north side of the salient. There was only one course open to the French, and that was to retire upon the Ailette river, and thus force the Germans to emerge from the valley within the woods and engage them in a country across which they had not prepared to advance. When the German pressure began to be felt on the 7th, the order was given to fall back upon the Ailette line. This retirement was made in the face of the enemy,

and cost our gallant allies not a single piece of artillery, not even a machine gun.

Near the middle of the angle which had to be given up stands the village of Barisis,* which was the point of junction between the British and French armies when the great offensive began on 21st March. Standing on the summit of a hill in this sector is the Château of Coucy.† Before the Germans disgraced themselves by blowing up portions of this castle during their retreat in 1917, it was one of the most striking monuments of the Middle Ages in the whole of Europe. The huge stronghold covered an area of 10,000 square yards. It was built in the thirteenth century, and until about 1400 remained in the possession of its founder's family, whose proud motto was :

"I am neither king, nor prince, nor duke, nor count ; I am the Lord of Coucy." It was dismantled in 1652, and is now public property. Before the war it was open to visitors on payment of a fee. The donjon keep was said to be the finest in Europe ; it was 210 feet high, 100 feet in diameter, and the walls in some places were thirty-four feet thick. Four smaller towers, a moat, and high walls also protected the castle, which is approached by long, steep slopes on all sides but one.

Map to illustrate the French retirement.



The castle of Coucy, still imposing in its ruins, was the pivot of the French retreat. Certain regiments were placed in the historic fortress, which had withstood a score of sieges, and were ordered to hold on at all costs until the movement was complete. This they did. The enemy, following his usual custom, sent forward many small parties of men to filter through the French lines before launching his main attack in dense masses. The French lined both sides of the valley with thirty-six machine guns, and when the enemy appeared he was greeted with a hail of bullets. His progress, however, could only be checked ; his numbers were too great to be stopped. For eighty-eight hours, ending at midday on 9th April, the thirty-six machine guns fired over a million rounds into the Germans. When the French finally fell back the valley was gray with German dead.

* Bar-e-sees.

† See illustration on p. 159.



His Majesty the King talking with a Soldier wounded in the Great Offensive.
(Official photograph.)

I have already told you that, shortly after the great offensive began, his Majesty the King, eagerly desirous to be with his soldiers in their hour of trial, visited the front. On 1st April, after his return to London, he wrote a letter to Sir Douglas Haig, in which he paid a high tribute to the courage and doggedness of the splendid troops which had withstood the great German onslaught. He tells us in this letter that he was fortunate enough to see some of the units which had been withdrawn from the firing-line, and that he "listened with wonder as officers and men narrated the thrilling incidents of a week's stubborn fighting." Some of these stories I have told you in former pages.

He was also present at the entraining of fresh troops eager to reinforce their comrades; and he visited a large casualty clearing station, where he saw the wounded receiving prompt and careful attention, and being passed on, when fit to travel, to the base hospitals. "The patient cheerfulness of the wounded was only equalled by the care and gentleness of those ministering to their wants."

"Though," says the King, "for the moment our troops have been obliged by sheer weight of numbers to give some ground, the impression left on my mind is that no army could be in better heart, braver, or more confident than that which you have the honour to command.

"Any one privileged to share these experiences would feel with me proud of the British race, and of that unconquerable spirit which will, please God, bring us through our present trials.

"We at home must ensure that the man-power is maintained, and that our workers, men and women, will continue nobly to meet the demands for all the necessities of war."

CHAPTER XIX.

AMERICA'S FIRST YEAR OF WAR.

APRIL 6, 1918, will be for ever memorable in the annals of the United States, for on that day a year previously the great American Republic took up arms against the nation that had made war its religion and armed force its god. Everywhere in America men observed the day, and renewed their vow never to cease from their efforts until the enemy of mankind had been overthrown. President Wilson, amidst the greatest enthusiasm, addressed 15,000 of his fellow-countrymen at Baltimore.

"This," he said, "is the anniversary of our acceptance of Germany's challenge to fight for our right to live and be free, and for the sacred rights of free men everywhere. The nation is awake. There is no need to call to it. We know what the war must cost—our utmost sacrifice, the lives of our fittest men, and, if need be, all that we possess. . . . The German programme once carried out, America and all who care or dare to stand with her must arm and prepare themselves to contest the mastery of the world—a mastery in which the rights of common men, the rights of women, and of all who are weak, must for the time being be trodden under foot and disregarded, and the old age-long struggle for freedom and right begin again at its beginning. Everything that America has lived for, and loved and grown great to vindicate, will have fallen in utter ruin, and the gates of mercy will once more be pitilessly shut upon mankind. . . .

"Germany has once more said that force and force alone shall decide whether justice and peace shall reign in the affairs of men. . . . There is, therefore, but one response possible from us—force, force to the utmost, force without stint or limit, the righteous and triumphant force which shall make right the law of the world and cast every selfish dominion down in the dust."

It was on April 2, 1917, that President Wilson called upon Congress to declare war upon Germany. You have not forgotten, I hope, the remarkable speech which he made on that occasion. Turn back to Vol. VII., Chapter XVII., and read once more his noble message. I can imagine American

[By permission of *The Sphere*.]

A Recruiting March in the United States



America's First Year of War.

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children learning by heart the concluding words of the President's address as they do the speech of Abraham Lincoln at Gettysburg :—

"To such a task we can dedicate our lives, our fortunes—everything we are, everything we have—with the pride of those who know the day has come when America is privileged to spend her blood and might for the principles that gave her birth, and the happiness and peace which she has treasured. God helping her, she can do no other."

Now let us see how America set about her great task. Within a fortnight of the President's speech a bill was passed raising £1,400,000,000 for equipping her armed forces. Some Americans desired to maintain a defensive war only, and merely to help the Allies with loans and supplies. President Wilson, on the other hand, insisted that America should not only give the Allies loans and all possible supplies, but that they should put the navy on a war footing, raise at least half a million men at once, and authorize the enlistment of as many more as might be needed. Such was President Wilson's programme, which soon won the full support of the whole nation.

You must not suppose that it was easy to persuade the American people to take these steps. The population of the United States is very mixed : almost all the peoples of Europe are represented, notably Irish, who have long been unfriendly to Britain ; Russians and Poles, who hated the tyranny under which they formerly lived ; and Germans, many of whom, even in their new, free, and prosperous homes across the Atlantic, were eager for the success of their Fatherland. Then, too, you must remember that the conflict in which they were now to engage was being waged in an old-world continent more than three thousand miles away. The American people might easily have been deceived into believing that no matter what happened in Europe they would be safe. Further, the Americans are a peace-loving people, devoted to commerce. War would mean a great interruption of business, a great sacrifice of men and money, sorrow in many homes, and anxiety everywhere. When we think of these things we are not surprised that it took three years of conflict and every kind of insult and outrage to make the Americans fling down the gage of battle. Nevertheless, we cannot but admire greatly the splendid spirit that was soon evident among them after they had taken the plunge.

They were heart and soul with the President when he declared that they were privileged to spend their blood and might for the principles which gave America her birth, and the happiness and peace which she had treasured. Never did a nation go to war for such unselfish and lofty ends.

I need not remind you that when the United States determined on war the Allies were joined by the greatest industrial country of the world. The area of the United States is over 3½ million square miles, or thirty times that of the United Kingdom. Her population is about 110 millions, and her national wealth is estimated at about 50,000 millions sterling, or about twice as much as that of the whole British Empire. More coal, iron, steel, copper, silver, petroleum, maize, wheat, oats, tobacco, and cotton are produced each year in America than in any other country of the world. You cannot but marvel at the gross stupidity of the Germans in so treating America as to make her devote all this wealth and abundance of natural resources to the cause of the Allies.

America has in her factories more than 50 millions of work-people, and her manufacturers are famed far and wide for their enterprise and skill. When war was declared, the leaders of industry turned their thoughts to the manufacture of munitions and war weapons. They needed time before they could produce war material on a large scale, but there could be no doubt that once the factories were in full swing the output would be immense.

Before war was declared, some regiments of the National Guard—that is, the militia of the various states—were called out; but these, together with the small regular army, were quite unprepared for war. The force consisted of only 130,000 regulars and 150,000 militiamen. Some 35,000 of the former were stationed in the Philippines, China, Panama, Hawaii, and Porto Rico. If we deduct non-combatants, the United States had only about 180,000 fighting men fit for battle. The army was a voluntary one, enlisted as our own army was before the war. At first men were urged to come freely to the colours; but the response was slow, and a new method had to be found. A Conscription Act was passed, and on June 5, 1917, upwards of 9½ millions of men between the ages of twenty-one and thirty registered themselves as ready to take up arms. More than 3,000,000 of these men were medically examined, and 687,000 of them were ordered to join up.

Between September 1917 and April 2, 1918, over 123,800 officers and 1,500,000 men were under training, and preparations were being made to call up another 800,000 men. So that whereas in April 1917 the effective armed forces of the United States were under 200,000, within a year they were nearly eight times as great.

Strenuous efforts were made to put the navy on a war footing, and in May 1917 American warships crossed the Atlantic and joined up with the British and French navies. Their cruisers and destroyers took an active part in hunting U-boats and in convoying troopships and merchant vessels. When the war broke out the sailors of the American fleet numbered only 60,000; in the course of a few months there were 150,000 afloat, and early in 1918 efforts were made to bring the man-power of the navy up to 230,000. The national shipyards soon began to be busy, and they devoted themselves chiefly to the building of destroyers for fighting submarines. In April 1918 it was said that 260 destroyers of the largest type were on the stocks, and were being completed at the rate of six a month. In addition, some 360 "submarine chasers" were being built in double-quick time in the factories of Mr. Ford, the motor-car manufacturer. Twenty great manufacturing plants were set apart for the building of aeroplanes, and it was anticipated in April 1918 that many more would soon be turned out at a bewildering rate.

I have already reminded you that three thousand or more miles of water separate the United States from the battlefields of France and Flanders. America's gravest difficulty was the transport of her men, guns, munitions, and food supplies to Europe. It was estimated that every soldier sent to France required at least five tons of equipment and supplies. This, of course, means that before America could send her millions across "the herring pond" she must build an immense number of transports and merchant vessels.

In the past America has been content to see her ocean-borne commerce carried to and fro in foreign ships. In 1915 the whole of her ships engaged in foreign trade had a tonnage of less than 2 million tons. The United Kingdom, as you know, has the largest mercantile marine in the world. In 1915 the tonnage of her vessels was estimated at about 12½ millions. By May 1918 the U-boats of the enemy had sunk 11 million tons of the world's shipping. Great Britain and the other maritime allies

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could, therefore, give but little assistance to their new ally. She had to rely upon herself, and begin to build ships in vast numbers. This was not easy to do, because the industry was at a low ebb. Shipbuilding yards had to be constructed ; plant and materials had to be provided ; workmen had to be secured and trained. Work was not begun as promptly as was expected ; but by April 1918 America had some of the largest shipbuilding yards in the world, and all were crowded with ships rapidly approaching completion.

During the war we in this country suffered from labour troubles. Strikes were not infrequent, and from time to time the output of our yards was gravely reduced. In America, after the declaration of war, labour lent itself readily to the great work of making the nation ready to fight. Many of the workmen who had emigrated from Eastern Europe were unwilling to help the Allies so long as the Tsar ruled in Russia, but after the revolution they were quite ready to put their backs into the great national task. The only people who stood aloof were the sympathizers with Germany. With these the Government dealt firmly and effectively.

While Europe was convulsed with strife, America was the one great manufacturing country which was free to supply the needs of the Allies and the neutrals. The consequence was that her industry developed greatly during the war, and her wealth increased by leaps and bounds. In the four years up to April 1918 it was estimated that the national wealth of America had grown by £100 per head of her huge population. Money, as you know, furnishes the sinews of war ; and when America flung herself into the fray all this new increase of wealth, as well as her former savings, was available for the great struggle. Louis XIV., during the European war of his day, declared that the last piece of gold would win. The saying is as true as ever it was, and the Allies took comfort from the knowledge that the coffers of the United States were filled to overflowing, while their own were sadly depleted, and those of Germany were well-nigh empty.

Early in June 1917 General Pershing, who was to command the American army, crossed over to France to examine the situation, and to make arrangements with the French military authorities. On 26th June the first American contingent landed on French soil, and thereafter troops continued to arrive in



American Soldiers in London.

(By permission of *The Sphere*.)

This picture shows a column of American soldiers passing under the Admiralty Arch, Trafalgar Square, London, on Saturday, May 11, 1918. The troops marched past Buckingham Palace, where the salute was taken by King George.

ever-increasing numbers. Before long the fully-trained men were in the firing-line, where they upheld the honour of their nation right worthily. By the close of the year there was an American army "of substantial size" * in France, and independent lines of communication and supply were under construction. By this time many Americans had made the great sacrifice : in the first year of war their total casualties by land and sea exceeded five thousand.

During the great German offensive of 1918, when the Allies were being tried to the utmost and every man was needed, the American Government gladly agreed that its soldiers in France should play their part in the fighting. It was intended that the Americans should operate as one army ; but when the Allies were in great straits, General Pershing made a generous offer to General Foch. At that time the United States had formed divisions of its own, but it had also a considerable number of regiments not yet sufficiently trained to be grouped into divisions, though quite capable of taking their place in the firing-line. These regiments General Pershing offered to the Allies, and agreed that they should be brigaded with French and British troops "until he wished to withdraw them in order to build up the American army." Naturally, the Americans hoped to go into battle shoulder to shoulder, with the Stars and Stripes waving above them. When, however, the Allies were in urgent need of reinforcement, our American cousins, in the most chivalrous fashion, set aside their national pride and thought only of the great issue at stake. The incident showed clearly that they were no whit behind the British and French in their " singleness of purpose," and that they were prepared to set aside their own wishes and fall in with any plan which would help to defeat the common enemy.

* In May 1918 the Prime Minister said that the Americans in France did not equal in numbers the Germans released from the Russian front and available for war in the West.

CHAPTER XX.

HEROES OF THE VICTORIA CROSS.

I MUST now resume the pleasing task of recording the heroism of those who were enrolled amongst the bravest of the brave by the award of that simple cross of bronze which every true soldier covets, but which many fail to win ; not because of any lack of courage or devotion, but simply because their deeds go unnoticed during the hurly-burly of battle. We shall do thousands of brave men a grave injustice if we assume that all who deserve the highest badge of valour receive it. You will notice, as you read the following pages, that the acts of heroism recorded were done during the retreat which I have described in former chapters. All whose names are mentioned received the proud decoration between the beginning of April and the end of May 1918. The first name on the list is that of

LANCE-CORPORAL CHARLES GRAHAM ROBERTSON, M.M.,
Royal Fusiliers.

Lance-Corporal Robertson, with three men, was holding a post when the enemy made an attack in force, and began to surround him and his little band. Sending back two of his comrades for reinforcements, the lance-corporal, with one companion, prepared to make a stand against a host. He soon got his Lewis gun to work, and laid many Germans low on his right. No reinforcements arrived, and he was completely cut off. He and his sole companion now withdrew to a point ten yards farther back, and once more rained bullets on the enemy.

In this position our hero remained for a considerable time, doing great execution on the advancing foe. Bombs were hurled at him, machine guns were turned on him, and his position became so perilous that he and his comrade withdrew and arrived safely at a defended post. Shortly afterwards he

climbed over the parapet with his faithful follower and mounted his gun in a shell-hole. Again he shot down many of the enemy who were advancing along and by the side of an adjacent trench. While engaged in this work his comrade was killed, and he himself was severely wounded. He managed to crawl back to the post, bringing his gun with him, and would have continued firing from his new position had not his ammunition run out.

His undaunted bravery and his determined resistance prevented the enemy from making a more rapid advance. It is impossible to overpraise the enterprise, resource, and magnificent fighting spirit of this gallant soldier.

CAPTAIN (ACTING LIEUTENANT-COLONEL) JOHN STANHOPE COLLINGS-WELLS, D.S.O., Bedfordshire Rifles.

When during a retirement the rearguard which Colonel Collings-Wells commanded was in great danger of being surrounded and captured, he called for volunteers to remain behind and hold up the enemy while their comrades withdrew. Volunteers were forthcoming, as they always are, for this perilous business, in which every man engaged knew that death or captivity awaited him. The little band set doggedly to work, and for one and a half hours stemmed the torrent of the advance. They did not withdraw until they had expended every round of ammunition. During the engagement Colonel Collings-Wells went to and fro amongst his men, guiding and encouraging them. The situation was saved by his great courage and fearless example.

On a later occasion, when his battalion was ordered to carry out a counter-attack, he displayed similar bravery. His men were worn out with six days' fighting, and they sorely needed an inspiring leader. He led the attack, and though twice wounded, refused to leave his men. Struggling onwards, he cheered and stimulated them until the moment when they won their objective. Then he fell dead, having played the part of a fearless and undaunted soldier to the end.

LIEUTENANT (ACTING-CAPTAIN) REGINALD FREDERICK JOHNSON HAYWARD, M.C., Wiltshire Regiment.

Captain Hayward, when his company was in action, displayed the most wonderful endurance and the rarest bravery. On the first day of the operations a bursting shell buried him, wounded him in the head, and deafened him. Nevertheless he

"carried on." Two days later his arm was shattered, and he received a fresh injury to the head. Even then he refused to hand over his command, and only when consciousness left him was he carried to the rear. Throughout the action the enemy made ceaseless attacks upon the trenches which he was holding. With an utter disregard of danger he went across the open from trench to trench, directing operations and encouraging his men. Never was there a greater triumph of spirit over body. Though racked with pain and disabled by wounds, he thought of nothing but his duty. By his ceaseless energy and fine example he so inspired his men that they beat off the German attacks.

LIEUTENANT GORDON MURIEL FLOWERDEW, Canadian Cavalry.

Lieutenant Flowerdew was in command of a squadron detailed for special service of great importance. On reaching his first objective he saw two lines of the enemy, each about sixty strong and armed with machine guns in their centre and on their flanks. One line was about two hundred yards behind the other. It was necessary that he should reach his final objective, so he determined to try to break through the two lines opposing him. He ordered a troop under Lieutenant Harvey, V.C., to dismount and carry out a flank movement, while he himself led the remaining three troops in a frontal charge. With waving swords the Canadians dashed down upon the enemy, and slew many of them. Then, wheeling about, they formed up and charged again. By this time the squadron had lost 70 per cent. of its members from rifle and machine-gun fire. Nevertheless, the survivors broke the ranks of the Germans and forced them to retire. The victors then took up a position, and after much hand-to-hand fighting were joined by Lieutenant Harvey's party. Lieutenant Flowerdew was dangerously wounded in both thighs during the engagement, but in spite of his sufferings continued to direct operations and cheer on his men. Canadians

" . . . from Montreal,
From Quebec and Saguenay,
From Ungava, Labrador,
All the lands about the bay
Which old Hudson quested for."

have every reason to be proud of the valour of this dauntless son of the Dominion.

LIEUTENANT ALAN JERRARD, Royal Air Force (formerly of the South Staffordshire Regiment).

While engaged on an offensive patrol with two other officers, Lieutenant Jerrard attacked five enemy aeroplanes, and shot one of them down in flames. He followed it to within a hundred feet of the ground, and then flew to an enemy aerodrome. Descending to within fifty feet of mother earth, he engaged some nineteen machines which were then landing or attempting to rise. He disabled one of them, and sent it crashing down upon the aerodrome. Then he was assailed by a large number of enemy machines. While fully engaged in beating them off, he saw one of the pilots of his patrol in difficulties. Careless of his own safety, he at once went to the rescue, and immediately afterwards destroyed a third enemy machine.

Fresh hostile planes continued to rise from the aerodrome, and he attacked them one after the other. While engaged with five enemy machines, he was ordered by his patrol leader to retreat. Although he seemed to be wounded, he turned repeatedly, and fell upon the pursuing machines. This he continued to do until he was overwhelmed by numbers and driven to the ground. The gallant young airman had greatly distinguished himself on four previous occasions, and had repeatedly shown bravery and skill of the highest order.

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